

# **In-Custody Death**

Fabrice Czarnecki, M.D., M.A., M.P.H.

Medical Advisor, National Law Enforcement Training Center

PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT

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#### **History:**

30 year old male standing in the middle of traffic, in a downtown street.

A police officer offers to help the subject. The subject seems to ignore to officer. The subject punches the officer, when touched. The subject and the officer struggle, and the subject is restrained.

The subject is brought to the hospital by the police for medical clearance.



#### Diagnosis:

Hypoglycemia
Diabetes mellitus

The subject's mental status returns to normal after receiving sugar in the emergency department. The subject apologizes to the officer. No charges are brought.

Graham v. Connor: Graham was suffering from hypoglycemia. Officers believed he was drunk, and refused to give him some sugar.



30 year old female who is found agitated in a street by the police.

EMS is called by the police. The subject is brought to the emergency department for confusion and hallucinations. She is cleared by the medical resident despite a low-grade fever (100.6 °F). The psychiatrist diagnoses a delusional disorder, calms her down with oral Haldol. The patient is discharged with a follow-up appointment.



Three hours later, EMS brings her back for a more severe agitation. She is given an injection of Haldol.

Then, the vital signs:

Heart rate: 100

Blood pressure: 90/50

SaO2: 75% (normal > 95%)



Chest X-ray: lobar pneumonia

#### Diagnosis:

Pneumonia (Streptococcus pneumoniae)

Septicemia

Septic shock

The patient was intubated in the emergency department, and admitted to the intensive care unit. She was given high doses antibiotics, but died 6 hours later.



30 year old male arrested for selling drugs.

He is brought to the emergency department for medical clearance.

No prior medical history.



Vital signs:

HR 140

BP 220/130

**RR 28** 

T 103.2

Patient is very agitated. No other findings in the physical exam.



The patient now admits to swallowing several bags of cocaine approximately 3 hours ago, when he was arrested.

The patient receives nitroglycerin and benzodiazepines, activated charcoal and polyethylene glycol. The patient subsequently develops generalized seizure activity, increasing hyperthermia, rhabdomyolysis, and intracranial hemorrhage. He expires 24 hours after admission.



# Causes of In-Custody Death -

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#### Diseases with disturbed behavior:

- Excited delirium
- Intracranial bleeding
- Encephalitis/Meningitis
- Seizures
- Complications of diabetes (hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia)
- Hypoxia
- Toxic coma
- Metabolic coma



# Causes of In-Custody Death -

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#### Exacerbation of pre-existing diseases:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Intracranial hemorrhage
- Seizures
- Asthma
- Sickle cell trait

Role of stress? (Lecomte, Forensic Sci Int 1996)

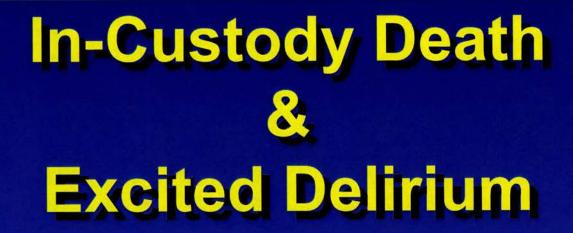


# Causes of In-Custody Death -

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## Injuries:

- Suicide
- Accident
- Homicide (including asphyxia by neck compression or thoracoabdominal compression)





#### **DEA Classification:**

- Narcotics
- Depressants
- Stimulants
- Cannabis
- Hallucinogens
- Anabolic Steroids



#### **Narcotics:**

- Heroin
- Morphine
- Codeine

Effects of overdose include coma and death



#### **Depressants:**

- Barbiturates
- Benzodiazepines (Valium)

Effects of overdose include coma and death



#### Stimulants:

- Cocaine
- Amphetamine/Methamphetamine
- Methylphenidate (Ritalin)



#### Cannabis:

- Marijuana
- Tetrahydrocannabinol
- Hashish



#### Hallucinogens:

- LSD
- Mescaline
- Psilocybin
- MDMA (Ecstasy)
- Phencyclidine (PCP)



#### **Anabolic Steroids:**

- Testosterone
- Nandrolone



# LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

#### **Absorption:**

- Oral (most commonly)
- Snorting
- Injection
- Smoking
- Conjunctival instillation

Duration of effects: 6-12 hours



## LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide)

#### Complications:

- Seizures
- Panic attack
- Excited delirium
- Stroke (cerebral vasospasm)



# Phencyclidine (PCP - phenylcyclohexylpiperidine)

#### **Absorption:**

- Smoking (most commonly), often mixed with marijuana
- Snorting
- Injection
- Oral



# Phencyclidine (PCP)

## **Complications:**

- Agitation
- Hyperthermia
- Rhabdomyolysis and renal failure
- Seizures
- Excited delirium
- Coma

Anticipate sudden violent acts:

"Results showed that PCP use was related to increased levels of hostility..." (McCardle, Addict Behav 1989)



# MDMA (Ecstasy)

3,4 methylenedioxymethylamphetamine

#### **Absorption:**

- Oral (most commonly)
- Snorting
- Injection

Commonly used at rave parties



# MDMA (Ecstasy)

## **Complications:**

- Agitation
- Dehydration with hyponatremia (diuretic effect)
- Hyperthermia
- Seizures
- Excited delirium



# Amphetamines

#### Types:

- Racemic amphetamine
- Dextro amphetamine (Dexedrine)
- Methamphetamine (crank, crystal, speed, ice)
- Over 14 different known drugs



# Amphetamines

## **Absorption:**

- Oral (most commonly)
- Injection
- Smoking
- Snorting

Duration of effects: 2-4 hours



# Amphetamines

#### Complications:

- Agitation
- Hyperthermia
- Rhabdomyolysis
- Excited delirium
- Cardiomyopathy



#### **Absorption:**

- Oral (most commonly)
- Injection
- Smoking
- Snorting
- Body packer

Duration of effects: 1-2 hours



## Cocaethylene:

- Potent active metabolite of cocaine + ethanol
- Duration of effects: up to 6 hours
- More active and more dangerous than cocaine



#### **Complications:**

- Agitation
- Hyperthermia
- Rhabdomyolysis
- Excited delirium
- Seizures
- Coma
- Cardiac complications



#### Sensitization

- Heightened response with chronic use (dopaminergic dysfunction)
- Probably the explanation of fatal excited delirium with "non-lethal doses" of cocaine

(Ruttenber, J Forensic Sci 1997)



#### Mechanism of death:

- Excited delirium and hyperthermia
- Myocardial infarction
- Arrhythmia
- Seizures
- Coma
- Exacerbation of pre-existing diseases:
  - Cardiovascular disease
  - Intracranial hemorrhage



# Combination of Drugs

In a large London hospital A&E department, 50% of the patients who had taken Ecstasy also took another illicit substance, mainly amphetamines and cocaine.

"The more serious complications of delirium, seizures, and profound unconsciousness (coma) were commoner when MDMA was used in combination with other substances."

(Williams, J Accid Emerg Med 1998)



## Delirium

#### **Definition:**

Acute change in mental status characterized by impairment of attention.

Diagnostic Criteria for Delirium (as defined by DSM-IV)

A.Disturbance of consciousness (i.e., reduced clarity of awareness of environment) with reduced ability to focus, sustain, or shift attention.

B.A change in cognition (such as memory deficit, disorientation, language disturbance) or the development of a perceptual disturbance that is not better accounted for by a preexisting, established, or evolving dementia.

C.The disturbance develops over a short period of time (usually hours to days) and tends to fluctuate during the course of the day.

Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 4th ed.



#### **Definition:**

Delirium with continuous agitation



#### Causes:

Toxic

Cocaine

**Amphetamines** 

**Ecstasy** 

PCP

LSD

- Drug withdrawal
- Psychosis (psychiatric disorder)



### **Complications:**

- Hyperthermia
- Rhabdomyolysis
- Hyperkalemia
- Metabolic acidosis
- Renal failure
- Hypoxia
- Sudden death (arrhythmia)

Comparable to the neuroleptic malignant syndrome



### **Early Management:**

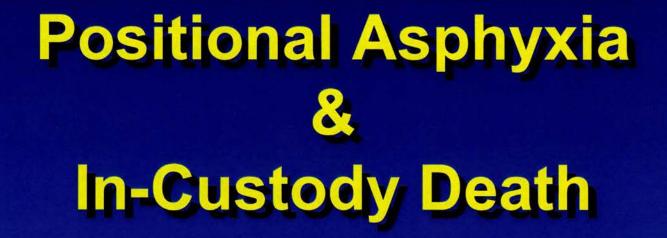
- CPR and defibrillation if necessary
- Sedation
- Cooling
- Restraints if necessary

Increased mortality if patient is restrained (without adequate sedation).



#### **Treatment:**

- Sedation (benzodiazepines)
- Oxygen
- Cooling
- Hemodialysis





## Definitions

### Asphyxia:

Extreme decrease in the amount of available oxygen in the body

### Two types:

- Mechanical
- Chemical (e.g., carbon monoxide)



## Definitions

### **Mechanical Asphyxia:**

- Strangulation (application of force to the neck, not resulting from the weight of the victim's body)
- Hanging (application of force to the neck, resulting from the weight of the victim's body)
- Suffocation
- Positional asphyxia
- Drowning (death due to submersion)



## Suffocation

#### **Definition:**

Failure of oxygen to reach the blood



## Suffocation

### Five types:

- Depletion or displacement of oxygen and carbon dioxide accumulation (e.g., sealed container)
- Smothering (obstruction of the nose and mouth -e.g., plastic bag)
- Choke (obstruction of the internal airway by a foreign object)
- Compression asphyxia (breathing hindered by external chest compression)
- Laryngeal edema (e.g., allergy)



# Positional Asphyxia

Body upside down, flexed neck

Usually associated with alcohol or drug intoxication



## Sudden Death & Restraints - 1

#### **Excited delirium**

Increased risk of sudden death if restrained (without sedation)

Pollanen, CMAJ 1998 Pudiak, Life Sci 1994 Ross, Mod Pathol 1998



## Sudden Death & Restraints - 2

Compression asphyxia
Do not sit on the chest of a subject!

StrangulationBar arm choke hold



Does hogtying kill?

Is it "positional asphyxia"?



### Parkes (Med Sci Law 2000):

- Longer recovery time (heart rate) in a facedown position
- No significant changes in oxygen saturation

### Schmidt (J Emerg Med 1999):

- Comparison between hogtie and sitting positions after physical exertion.
- No significant differences in recovery heart rate and oxygen saturation between the two positions.



### Chan (Ann Emerg Med 1997):

- Comparison between hogtie and sitting positions after physical exertion.
- Minor decline in pulmonary functions tests in the hogtie position.
- No significant difference in heart rate recovery, oxygen saturation and PCO2 between the two positions.



Hogtying does not appear to cause significant respiratory compromise.

Hogtying does not constitute "positional asphyxia".

Sudden deaths in the hogtie position are probably caused by excited delirium.



# Taser and In-Custody Death

## Kornblum (J Forensic Sci 1991):

- Review of 16 deaths "associated wit the use of the Taser".
- All subjects were drug users.
- The responding officers believed the subjects were under the influence of PCP (disturbed behavior).



# Taser and In-Custody Death

### Kornblum (J Forensic Sci 1991):

#### Cause of death:

- Overdose of drugs (cocaine, PCP, amphetamine) -11 cases
- Gunshot wounds 3 cases
- Heart disease and Taser shock 1 case
- Undetermined 1 case

"The conclusion reached after evaluation of these cases is that the Taser in and of itself does not cause death, although it may have contributed to death in one case."





# Subjects at Risk

- Obese
- Elderly
- Prior medical condition

Sickle cell trait

**Asthma** 

Diabetes

Cardiac diseases

Intoxication

Ed Nowicki: 60% of subjects resisting arrest are under the influence of alcohol or drugs (probably underestimated).



### **Training:**

- Be aware of excited delirium and other deadly medical problems.
- Know when to call EMS and do not hesitate to do it.

### Medical training:

- CPR and first aid -- Mandatory!
- Police AED (automated external defibrillator) program
- First responder certification (40 hours)
- Additional training for jail personnel?



#### **Restraints:**

- Probably better to avoid the hog-tie position
- Have other types of restraints available
- Do not compress the chest
- Sit the subject as soon as possible, if level of consciousness is normal



#### **Excited delirium:**

- Extreme agitation
- Naked subject

IACP criteria (Granfield, International Association of Chiefs of Police 1994):

- Bizarre and/or aggressive behavior
- Shouting
- Paranoia
- Panic
- Violence towards others
- Unexpected physical strength
- Sudden tranquility



#### When to call EMS:

- Signs of distress (loss of consciousness, difficulty to breathe, chest pain...)
- Unusual agitation (excited delirium)



### Transport the subject to the hospital:

- Disturbed behavior
- Intoxication
- If the subject requests it
- According to a written procedure (use of nonlethal rounds, LVNR, OC)
- Medical clearance for every arrest?

Transportation by EMS preferred (depending on local constraints)



#### **Documentation:**

- Level of consciousness (AVPU scale)
- Subject on medication?
- Orientation
- Quality of speech

...



## In-Custody Death Prevention

Speech is perhaps the most sensitive indicator in differentiating between organic and psychiatric disease. Patients with an organic alteration of mental status generally have globally slowed speech patterns. There are often problems with articulation, particularly in toxic-metabolic encephalopathies. Speech that is rapid, well articulated, and well enunciated indicates that the vast majority of the nervous system is functioning normally. Even patients with severe psychiatric disorders often speak rapidly, clearly, and without any obvious hesitation.

(G. Henry, in Harwood-Nuss: The Clinical Practice of Emergency Medicine, 1997)



# In-Custody Death Prevention

Segest (J Forensic Sci 1987):

Review of 19 deaths in police custody in Denmark

Most frequent causes of death:

Alcohol intoxication

Drug poisoning

Intracranial hemorrhage

"A physician had been consulted but had not diagnosed the seriousness of the condition in 42% of the deaths."